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ABSTRACT

One reason that university students fail to achieve optimally in course work is their lack of reading skills. The higher education student needs to achieve skills appropriate to the involved task in reading. Through diagnosis, it is possible to ascertain weak links in the reading achievement of students. For students to achieve optimally from reading activities in the university curriculum they must develop the following reading skills: (1) reading for securing generalizations; (2) reading to analyze ideas; (3) reading to solve problems; and (4) reading to develop creative thought. (PRA)

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READING ON HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

One reason that university students fail to achieve optimally in course work is the lack of reading skills. Higher education classes tend to emphasize much reading and thus learning indeed becomes abstract. Reading is a major way of acquiring subject matter. Reading, too, is prized highly in society as a way of securing occupational information (utilitarian purposes), relaxing (enjoyment and leisure experience), and guidance sources (means of attaining models and bibliotherapy). Harp and Brewer[1] wrote:

> Frank Smith (1978) and Ken Goodman (1970) have done pioneering work in helping us understand the reading process and this thing called "comprehension." They stress the importance of prediction in comprehension. As you read or listen to language, you are continuously predicting what will be said next. As long as your predictions are confirmed, you continue to read or listen with good comprehension, using the fewest possible cues provided by the writer or speaker. Comprehension is this process of predicting content just ahead, confirming the prediction, and making the next prediction, a process resulting in the creation of meaning. An interaction occurs between the ideas of the author and the schemata of the reader. Predictions are based in part on the syntactic and semantic cues on the printed page or in the speech. But the comprehension process is greatly facilitated by another cueing system. We said earlier that the ideas you have about people, your language, and the world are called schemata. The cues to understanding provided by your schemata are called schematic cues. This cueing system may be the most powerful contributor to comprehension. We have defined comprehension in a way that recognizes

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the importance of schematic cues. Comprehension is the interaction of the ideas of the author and the schemata of the reader that leads to understanding.

Needed Reading Skills

The higher education student needs to achieve skills appropriate to the involved task in reading. Through diagnosis, one can ascertain weak links in reading achievement of students. Too frequently students read content as isolated facts. It becomes difficult to retain specific items. Rather, university students need guidance to perceive the relationship of content. After reading a given selection, the instructor may ask students to give one sentence covering subject matter read. The one sentence or main idea can be substantiated, modified, or refuted by providing supporting details. Thus, the specifics are related to a larger whole, such as the main idea. The facts are then not acquired in fragments, but become a part of a broad generalization. For example, if a student presents a main idea from reading a selection that "Benedict Spinoza was a stoic in philosophical beliefs," facts would need to be given by the reader as supporting details. Educational psychologists have long believed that related knowledge is remembered longer than the unrelated. Increased understanding comes from content perceived as being related.

A second reading skill for higher education students to develop is analytical reading. Reading proficiency demands

that the student analyze what has been read. To analyze, the student needs to separate the relevant from the irrelevant, the significant from the insignificant, as well as the accurate from the inaccurate. Thus in discussing Plato's Republic, university students should analyze that people in society could be divided into three classes -rulers, warriors, and workers- to represent justice in the societal arena. Of lesser value in saliency would be that individuals drank water from the River Leeds. The latter would be highly specific and would not in and of itself be necessary to retain to understand the concept of justice in dividing people into three classes in Plato's Republic. Accuracy of subject matter is always important to acquire. With the mass amount of knowledge available to readers, it becomes complex indeed to remember ideas and their accurate form. Conscientious authors as well as lecturers at times present the inaccurate. It might be a year of birth such as Johann Friedrich Herbart incorrectly listed as being born in 1876, instead of 1776. The times and setting differ for philosophers so that Herbart's life span covering 1776-1841 represents a period of time in which philosophical beliefs can greatly vary from one decade to the next or one century to the next. Philosophies occur in time and place and need to be appraised within this context.

A third reading skill for higher education students to attain is problem solving. Much of life in society stresses

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identifying and solving problems. Individuals need to perceive gaps in knowledge. These gaps present problems. If a student, for example, identifies a question pertaining to how the philosophical thinking of realists differ from logical positivists, data need to be gathered from a variety of reference sources. Information read should pinpoint likenesses and differences between the two philosophies. The answer is tentative and should be considered as an hypothesis. Additional reading, thought, and reflection aids in testing the hypothesis. Revision of the original hypothesis may be an end result.

Problem solving is salient in the academic abstract world, as well as in the practical societal arena. Thus, problem solving skills are salient in reading as well as in life's situations.

A fourth reading skill is creativity. Novel, original ideas should be pursued by all in society. The creative involves the unique and the different. Frequently, improvements in society come from creative endeavors. From <u>what is</u> to what <u>should be</u> could stress creative thinking. Unique content then must be encouraged from learners.

Thus a student might develop a philosophy of his/her own different from the traditional schools of thought such as realism, pragmatism, idealism, existentialism, Thomism, and perennialism. Ideas developed by the university student could truly be called a philosophical school of thought.

New ways of perceiving subject matter is welcomed in the academic realm as well as in the utilitarian. University instructors need to recognize the contributions of the truly creative being. To secure background content, for creative thought, much reading is involved. Barr, Sadow, and Blachowicz[2] wrote:

> We have argued that a diagnosis of difficulty in the area of comprehension can generally be made once it has been determined that print skill and vocabulary knowledge are not underlying sources of poor comprehension. Once such a decision has been made, it is useful to explore further to identify the nature of the comprehension problem. That is, in order to provide appropriate instruction, it is necessary to determine whether a student's difficulty stems from poorly developed strategies for interacting with text and organizing text information or from the student's inability to understand the information the text contains.

In Closing

To summarize, four distinct reading skills for university students were discussed. These included:

1. Reading for securing generalizations.
2. Reading to analyze ideas.
3. Reading to solve problems.
4. Reading to develop creative thought.

Each needs adequate emphasis in the university curriculum. students individually need to achieve optimally from reading activities in the university curriculum.

Selected References

1. Harp, Bill, and Jo Ann Brewer. Reading And Writing, Reaching for the Connections, p. 35-36. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1991.

2. Barr, Rebecca, Marilyn Sadow, and Camille Blachowicz. Reading Diagnosis for Teachers, An Instructional Approach, p. 204-205. Longman 1990.